

The Countries Complaint against the Aulnagers:

O R,

REASONS Humbly offered to the Parliament for taking away the Office, Seal, and Duty of *AULNAGE*, and laying a Duty in lieu thereof upon Woollen Manufactures Exported.

THIS Office of *AULNAGE* was Constituted for the Measuring, Weighing, and Searching of Cloath; And to the Intent that the Dealers therein might not be deceived, the Seal was put on to signifie the goodnes thereof; And the Fee of a Half-penny for a whole Cloath, and a Farthing for a half Cloath was given upon that Consideration.

This *Subsidy* of *Aulnage* was granted to the Crown at the same time in consideration of the Repealing a *STATUTE* made the 25 *Edw. 3.* which was grievous to the Cloathiers and Merchants, for by that *Statute* all Cloath that wanted a Yard the Length appointed was forfeited to the King.

This *Subsidy* was Four-Pence for a whole Cloath, Two-Pence for a half Cloath, &c. And the weight of such Cloath was accounted to be 64 Pound. This *Subsidy* and Fee of the *AULNAGER* have been confirmed by Subsequent Statutes; And 'tis agreed that a Duty is due, and have been paid for all Cloaths according to the said Statutes.

Since the granting of this Duty there have been several new Invented Cloaths, and other Woollen Manufactures made, upon which great Controversies have arisen whether any, or how much Duty is due for the same; And many Suits have been Commenced, some are now depending, and more are like to arise thereupon: And since the Constituting of this Office there have been several Statutes made for the better regulating of Cloath, by which Statutes the Office of the *AULNAGERS* as to the measuring, &c. is taken away and put into other hands.

Yet notwithstanding the *AULNAGERS* are still continued, and for this Reason, only to Collect the *Subsidy* of *Aulnage* due to the Crown as aforesaid, and the Seal of the Office is put on for no other reason, then to signifie the Duty is paid.

This Duty and Office is now granted by Patent to the Dutcheſs of *Richmond*, and by her Let to Farm in the Year 1681. to Sir *John Eyles* and others, at the Yearly Rent of 3138 *l.* 10 *s.* besides a considerable Fine as is pretended of about 9000 *l.* paid for a Lease for Twenty-one Years.

Before these *FARMERS* time, this Office was much Complained against, by reason of many Exactions and Abuses of former *Farmers*, who had advanced several Branches of the Duty beyond what it was in all former times; And this Sir *John Eyles*, and some others that are now concerned in the Farm, were the greatest Complainers against these Exactions in those times, and the reason as was pretended of their taking the Farm, was for the remedying thereof.

But these *Farmers* Consulting their own Profit more then the ease of the Cloathiers, taking the Advantage of the late times, set up many new pretences to increase their Farm, upon which great Controversies arose, Some not willing to stand the Tryal and Charge of Law Suits submitted, others withstood, upon which many Suits were commenced, in some of which the Manufactures, but in others the *FARMERS* prevailed, by which means they have greatly increased their Farm, and by their Exactions, and otherwise, raise near 10000 *l.* per Annum.

The manner of Collecting this Duty is very grievous to all the Dealers in the Woollen Manufacture. For,

THAT in many places for a Half-peny or Penny Seal, they are forced to carry their Goods to several Offices a great distance from their Habitations, by which means their Goods are much damaged, their Inventions exposed, their Markets oft-times lost, which is much more grievous than the payment of the Duty.

THAT in other places they are forced to send for Seals many Miles, and many times the *AULNAGERS* not having Seals, the Cloaths for want thereof have been sent up to *London* or other places where they have been seized, and the Cloathiers put to great Charge and Trouble to have them again.

THAT they make frequent searches at the *Dressers*, *Dyers*, *Pressers*, &c. And if by any Accident the Seals be dropped off, as it will oft-times happen, they seize the Goods and carry them away.

THAT they make frequent search at Inns; Search Waggon or Horses Packs upon the Road, search Fairs, Markets, *Blackwell-hall*, *Custom-House-Keys*, Merchants and Factors Shops and Ware-houses, and where else they please, seize and carry away what they find unsealed.

THAT they enter into, and search all Retailers Shops and Ware-Houses, rifles all their Goods, disturb their Markets, seize and carry away either whole Pieces or Remnants if unsealed, although they have been sealed, and the Seal end of the Remnants be sold; this being such an extraordinary Grievance, the Retailers are forced to yearly Compositions to be freed from the trouble and search, and near 200 are under Contribution in one County.

THAT Retailers of Stockings and Hats, have been forced to Compositions, although neither Stockings nor Hats were ever (or pretended to be) liable to be Sealed by the pair or Hat.

THAT all Goods seized in the Country are presently Compounded for, or else carried to the *AULNAGERS* Houses or Inns, where the Cloathiers and Shop-keepers are forced to attend and Compound at what rates these *Aulnagers* please; Or if they refuse, then are their Goods returned into the *Exchequer*, or at least pretended so to be, to the great discouragement, loss and vexation of the Owners thereof.

THAT all Goods Seized in and about *London* are carried to an Office, where at certain times the *FARMERS* set to hear and determine all Complaints, where the Persons grieved wait and attend, where after considerable waiting are called in and heard, and after a short hearing are ordered to withdraw, and then called in again to hear the Sentence, which if they like not they may take their Remedy: And what is that? Their Goods are Condemned to be returned into the *Exchequer*, where they must sue for them, which remedy, being in most Cases worse than the disease, forceth the Complainers to suffer the loss of their Goods unjustly, rather than to be at a greater Charge and Loss to obtain them again.

THAT although it have been made appear, that their Goods hath been seized wrongfully, yet have they refused to deliver them again till certain Fees as they pretend, as due for *Porterage*, *Warehouse room*, &c. be allowed.

THUS are all the Dealers in the Woollen Manufacture oppressed, and all this for a small and inconsiderable Duty, not amounting to 5 *s.* for a Hundred Pound value. Thus are the Wheels of Trade clogged with an Unnecessary Office and Unreasonable Officers, who under the specious pretences of increasing the Revenue of the Crown, have been, and are endeavouring to keep up and increase their own profit and gain.

This Office being thus grievous, hath caused several Complaints in former Parliaments, but more especially in the last, to whom several Petitions were presented from the Cloathiers of *Glostershire*, *Suffolk*, and *Essex*, the *Weavers* of *Norwich*, the *Hosiery*, *Drapers*, *Mercers*, *Salesmen*, and others, Complaining of great Exactions and Abuses, which Petitions being referred to a Committee were Examined, and a report thereof was made to the House, upon which it was ordered; That leave be given to bring in a Bill to regulate the Abuses of the *Aulnage*.

Upon which Order, there were several Meetings of many Worthy Members, to Consider of the best ways and means to accomplish the same; who finding how difficult it would be if the Office should be continued to remedy the Grievances Complained of; and understanding that the Seal of the Office did not answer the end of its Constitution; And being informed, that in case the Duty were Collected at the *Custom-House*, it would bring in more Money to the Crown, then the *Farmers* pay for their Farm.

Thereupon it was agreed, That a Bill should be drawn up to take away the Office and Duty of *Aulnage*, and to lay a Duty in lieu thereof at the *Custom-House*.

Accordingly a Bill was prepared and presented to the House, and well received, but by reason of the Prorogations and Dissolution, there wanted time for the finishing it.

A Bill for the same purpose is again presented, (and now before this Honourable House) the Substance of which is:

That, Forasmuch as the sealing of Cloaths by the *Aulnagers*, is now of no other use, than to signifie the payment of a Duty for them; and that the manner of Collecting such Duty is very chargeable to the Crown, and very Grievous to the Subject. Therefore,

I. That this Office and Duty should be wholly taken away.

II. That in lieu thereof, a Duty should be charged upon the Woollen Manufacture Exported, to be received at the *Custom-House*.

III. That this Duty so charged, should be Collected in the same manner as the rest of the Kings Customs are.

IV. That out of this Duty the Dutcheſs of *Richmond* should be paid as much as shall appear to be her due, in consideration of her Interest.

The Bill doth not ascertain what Duty shall be paid, but is left to be filled up as this Honourable House shall think fit.

And if a Duty not exceeding what was paid to the *AULNAGERS* for a Cloath, &c. before their late Exactions be made payable at the *Custom-House*, for so much of the Woollen Manufacture as is Exported, it will bring in more Money to the Crown then is now, or can be paid if the *Aulnage*-Office should be continued (as is ready to be made appear by Accompts taken out of the *Custom-House* Books.) The reason of which is very easy to be understood; For by this way of Collecting the charge of *FARMERS* and Officers will be saved, which is now so great, that all the Duty payable for the Woollen Manufacture worn in *England* will not defray it.

But forasmuch as the Duty as now Collected, is subject upon the alteration of the length and breadth of Cloath, to great Disputes and Controversies.

'Tis therefore humbly Proposed:

That the Duty that should be added to the Customs in lieu of the *Aulnage*, should be in general terms a Six-peny, that is, a six part more than is now paid there according to the Books of Rates, which will not be so great a Duty, as is now paid to the *AULNAGERS*, taking one sort of Woollen Manufacture with the other, which will be more easy, and equally Collected and Paid, and will amount to near Six Thousand Pound per Annum, which will not only be sufficient to answer the Dutcheſs of *Richmonds* Interest, but a considerable Overplus.

Which Overplus Summ of Money, is Humbly proposed as a proper and necessary Fund, to be Employed as this Honourable House shall think fit, to hinder the Exportation of Wool, there wanting a Fund of Money for that purpose.

For, by an Act made in the last Parliament, Commissioners were appointed to take care to put the former and that Act against the Exportation of Wool in Execution; But for want of a Fund of Money, have not, nor cannot proceed in their Commission to any good purpose.

Which Money so employed, will be both to the Advantage of the Crown, to the Benefit of the Merchants, Exporters, and Woollen Manufacturers.

The Advantages by this Change will be very considerable:

For by this means the Revenue of the Crown, will not only be preserved but increased; the Dutcheſs of *Richmond* paid her due; all Controversies about the Right of the Duty wholly at an end; the Manufacture greatly eased, and the Manufacturers and all the Dealers therein, wholly freed from the trouble and charge of an unnecessary Office, and Unreasonable Officers: The Duties that shall still be paid, Collected in a more regular and equal manner, and none left in a condition to complain; but the present *Farmers* and their numerous Substitutes, who will only loose the profit of their Farm and Offices, which they have by their Exactions abused, and along time enjoyed, to the Vexation and Discouragement of all the Dealers in the Woollen Manufacture.

And the Manufacturers are the more Incouraged to hope this method will be approved of, by reason that a Bill of like nature lately passed, which was the Act for taking away the Excise of Coffee, Chocolate, and Tea, and laying a Duty in lieu thereof upon the Berry, &c.